



Photo by SSG Sean A. Foley (U.S. Army)

Information Engagement: Operations in a permissive environment

By MAJ Lyndon D. Jones

With the publication of *Field Manual 3-0 Operations* in February 2008, the Army changed the conceptual framework for information operations. Instead of information operations performing an integrating function for the staff, the new Army information tasks institutionalize information operations functions into separate staff divisions. This change addresses the cognitive domain of the information environment below the operational level in a way that *Joint Publication 3-13 Information Operations* does not. *Field Manual 3-0* accomplishes this by grouping the message (strategic communication and defense support to public diplomacy) and the means (leader, Soldier, public affairs, psychological operations and combat camera) into one of five Army information tasks — Information Engagement.

U.S. Army South is the Army Service Component Command for U.S. Southern Command and, therefore, conducts much of its operational planning with respect to joint doctrine. However, many of the exercises within the focus area are executed below the divisional level by forces from the reserve

component. Beyond the Horizon is one such example of an Army South mission led by a brigade-level commander in a permissive environment.

Information engagement best practices.

With the update of *Field Manual 3-0*, how does the Army translate joint doctrine, including *Joint Publication 3-13* and associated policy statements, into useful information engagement applications in a theater of operation? I will use Beyond the Horizon to demonstrate how employing information engagement in permissive environments can support the delivery of strategic messaging best and discuss some best practices to ensure operational success.

Appoint an information engagement officer. Beyond the Horizon is conducted in Southern Command's permissive area of responsibility and carried out largely by Soldiers from the reserve component. Beyond the Horizon integrates engineering, medical, small-unit familiarization program engagements, reciprocal platoon exchanges, subject matter expertise exchanges and state partnership activities under one umbrella. Beyond the Horizon makes best use of resources while simultaneously building partner-nation capabilities and benefiting the affected local populations.

During these missions, the information engagement officer is the tactical commander's strategic linchpin between the operational planning and tactical implementation that translates *Joint Publication 3-13* into effective information. The information engagement officer provides the strategic key player to facilitate continuity, effective coordination and synchronization of capabilities, resulting in a more productive and robust information environment plan that enables training opportunities for reservists and supports the commander's strategic communication objectives.

According to my experience, it is imperative that an information engagement officer be appointed to serve on staff. The challenge of Beyond the Horizon begins with manning. Reserve component brigades, battalions and companies often deploy without an information engagement officer. U.S. Army South's assigning an information engagement officer provided an effective bridge to cover potential continuity gaps. This action officer is responsible for planning that begins in the early stages and continues through execution, ideally with the information environment action officer serving as the information engagement officer. This practice was very effective

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in establishing expectations for each capability based on command guidance and coordination with respective directorates, translating *Joint Publication 3-13* into effective information environment as outlined in FM 3-0.

The information engagement pre-deployment tour. During the planning phase, an information operation is always a stated priority, but frequently becomes overshadowed by logistical and operational issues. In an attempt to support information operation objectives without compromising the focus, U.S. Army South's G7 (Fires and Effects Directorate) and G3 (Operations Directorate), and the Beyond the Horizon exercise commander and his S3 (Operations Officer for the exercise) or conducted a one-week information environment pre-deployment tour in coordination with military assistance and advisory group and the U.S. Embassy in Santo Domingo in support of Beyond the Horizon 2009 – Dominican Republic.

This tour consisted of two components, the key leader engagements and media engagements. The tour succeeded in terms of pre-deployment messaging, reaching key-partner nation's political and civic leaders, as well as important media sources. **JUST AS ONE SENDS SCOUTS OUT ON A ROUTE RECONNAISSANCE, ONE MUST GET AN INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT OFFICER OUT EARLY TO MEET RESPECTIVE KEY LEADERS.** The information environment pre-deployment tour is recommended as standard practice and serves as an effective intelligence preparation of the information environment.

A joint operation named New Horizon 2006 – Dominican Republic was the catalyst for the information environment pre-deployment tour. There was little or no pre-deployment messaging to inform the public of the scope and details of the exercise; as a result, Dominicans were left to draw their own conclusions.

Consider the context, it is 2006 and the U.S. is engaged in the War on Terrorism. Bystanders observed bulldozers on the backs of flatbed trucks driven by U.S.

Soldiers moving through their towns. A generation of Dominicans vividly recalled the U.S. intervention and occupation in 1965 during the height of the Vietnam conflict. The media, unaware and always game for a sensational story ran with a negative story line. The result? Soldiers who deployed expecting to train and put their skills to good use were left frustrated. As a result, the U.S. taxpayer got less than what a sound information strategy could have achieved.

For 2009's exercise, U.S. Army South, Puerto Rico's National Guard, Dominican Republic's state partner and the Beyond the Horizon headquarters element led with a tour a month before the operation. The populace got the opportunity to understand the purpose and intentions of the U.S. presence as an invited guest and valued partner nation through the use of traditional media and key leader communications.

Leader and Soldier engagement and the information environment reception briefing. At U.S. Army South, G7 developed an information environment brief that is provided as part of the reception brief for all incoming Beyond the Horizon Soldiers. The brief underscored the critical role of the leader and Soldier as strategic messengers in the context of national security. In the case of Beyond the Horizon, leaders and Soldiers have a unique training opportunity that enables relationships between Soldiers and partner-nation members that can serve to propagate the strategic message directly. **THEREFORE, SOLDIER LANGUAGE AND ACTIONS SHOULD BE CONSISTENT WITH THEMES AND MESSAGES.**

Just as every Soldier is a rifleman, every Soldier is a strategic messenger and should be trained accordingly. Ultimately, a reception brief addressing leader and Soldier engagements is only as effective as the leadership that reinforces Soldier expectations throughout each Soldier's tour of duty as a strategic messenger.

The Soldier has a unique and significant role in his ability to reinforce and amplify positive actions and increase goodwill and support for the friendly mission. To reinforce Soldier expectations, the G7 designed a

simple, yet effective, assessment tool to capture the public relations posture on the ground and to serve as an early warning and mitigation mechanism should concerns arise. In effect, it serves as an inside-out view of how we see ourselves in relation to the local populace.

Public service announcements. This year U.S. Army South's G7, with support from the Office of Strategic Communication, developed a template for a public service announcement script as a way to leverage mass communications despite budget constraints. Because public service announcements are based on donated media time and the benefits of Beyond the Horizon's medical readiness training exercises and related services represented need-to-know public information, the public service announcement served as a cost-effective means to increase awareness within the construct of the partner-nation's local media while also serving as a catalyst for all other Beyond the Horizon activities.

The public service announcement initially was employed in the Dominican Republic and proved to be very effective. While on the surface it gives the appearance of a simple promotional announcement, there are several subtle key messages. This public service announcement included the partner-nation's lead and ownership of Beyond the Horizon, the state partnership program between Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, and the exercise's duration. The initial assessments were that the public service announcement script was received well and was overwhelmingly preferred to the audio product. Reports indicate that recipients of the public service announcement heard it more than three times daily. Additionally, the initial recipients forwarded the read-script to their affiliates and professional peers, expanding the overall coverage.

Our recommendation is to develop the public service announcement as a three-part package consisting of a read-script, audio format and video format, accommodating radio and television formats. As a rule, the public service announcement should not exceed 45 seconds. The commander may select the highest quality of each for recommended distribution in coordination with the respective security cooperation offices and the U.S. Embassies.

The public service announcement, due to its negligible production requirements, should be the minimum standard. Local populations are only one of several important audiences. The media itself is another audience; the better informed the

media is, the less likely it will be to entertain and promote negative propaganda stemming from uninformed speculation.

Moving from stovepipes to partnerships. Conceptually, information engagement is sound and considerably easier to grasp as an Army information task than joint and former Army information operations doctrine. Doctrinally, the coordinating and integrating civil-military operations remains an issue of debate. Tactically, there is significant work to overcome the friction that exists between unit sections and their respective organizational cultures. Keeping the functions segregated into their respective “stovepipes” is inefficient and results in the underuse of capabilities and resources. Successful information engagement comes from an understanding of purpose and successful partnerships.

Educating tactical commanders. The information proponent office at Fort Leavenworth is working hard to train enough Functional Area 30 Information Operations officers to meet Army tactical-level needs. The Information Officer Qualification course is the only course in the Army inventory that requires officers to pass an oral comprehension board as a condition of graduation. This is an important

feature that enables graduates to educate the Army at-large with respect to information engagement and emerging doctrine.

In practice, some exercises are too short in duration to allow for tactical commanders to begin learning on day one. With information engagement, timing and momentum are the keys to success. For example, New Horizon 2006 – Dominican Republic, the task force found themselves adrift responding to misinformation because the messaging was reactive versus proactive.

Trained Functional Area 30 officers, when available, understand information operations and have the ability to articulate them to tactical commanders. They need to have the time and resources to educate commanders and shape the information environment.

Understanding strategic communication. Effective strategic communication is a top priority for U.S. military leaders. But that does not mean that every military leader conceptually understands strategic communication. Some of our peers are brave enough to ask the question, “What is strategic communication?” So what is strategic communication and who is responsible for it at the tactical level?

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION IS MESSAGING. JUST AS EVERYONE IS A SAFETY OFFICER REGARDLESS OF RANK, THE SAME APPLIES TO STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION — EVERYONE IS A STRATEGIC MESSENGER. As with safety, in which the commander designates an officer to be responsible for the overall coordination of safety measures, the S7, or the information officer at the brigade or battalion level, serves the tactical commander as the chief communication officer. In the Army, this officer is normally Functional Area 30 Information Operations trained individual responsible for incorporating strategic communication into all operations, actions, activities, and products to maximize available capabilities, means and methods.

In joint commands, however, the strategic communication may fall in a separate directorate. For that reason, there is a need to doctrinally differentiate from *Joint Publication 3-13* to *Field Manual 3-0* as it applies to the tactical commander so as not to confuse it with information engagement. Information engagement is the broad umbrella that incorporates both the message and the means. Although civil affairs is not included in information engagement’s broad umbrella as a doctrinal



1LT Francis Lamb, a personnel officer with 301st Reserve Support Group, sits down to talk with school children in La Granja, Honduras, where U.S. and Honduran Soldiers renovated their school, May 2, 2008. The renovation project was part of Beyond the Horizon. (Photo by SSG Sean A. Foley, U.S. Army)

capability, it is a means and key enabler in support of strategic messaging at the grassroots through key leader engagement and civic action projects.

J-staff versus s-staff. Planning at the tactical level, according to *Field Manual 3-0* and *Field Manual 5-0 Army Planning and Orders Production*, is intentionally and inherently different for U.S. Army and joint forces. This excerpt from *Field Manual 3-0*, Appendix D is instructive. "Army forces do not use the joint systems analysis of the operational environment, effects-based approach to planning, or effects assessment. These planning and assessment methods are intended for use at the strategic and operational levels by properly resourced joint staffs."

It is important to understand that while a sprinkling of multiservice may constitute joint forces, it doesn't necessarily constitute a joint staff or j-staff. This is important because a j-staff implies joint doctrine. Joint information operations doctrine is not designed to address the cognitive domain below the operational level. Operational planning for the j-staff is inherently more applicable to the strategic and operational levels.

The s-staff represents the tactical implementation through the Army military decision-making process that takes place at division and below. The S7's roles and responsibilities should remain aligned with tactical Army doctrine, including the decision-making process and the conduct of the tactical information engagement mission and strategic communications to address the cognitive domain of the information environment better.

This article provides a snapshot of the current state of information engagement for the permissive environment within a service component command. **THE INFORMATION ENGAGEMENT PRACTITIONER SHOULD EMPLOY THESE RECOMMENDED BEST PRACTICES WITHOUT DELAY.** The information engagement pre-deployment tour, in support of pre-deployment messaging requirements, is the primary method for deploying the best practices described in advance of an operation, activity or action in a permissive environment.

With representation from each participating capability, including civil affairs and command and staff, this is effective in promoting the partnership and

educating the tactical commander regarding information engagement and strategic messaging. Planners must make every effort to support this activity and ensure the selection and availability of key leadership for this requirement.

One additional recommendation, from a professional development standpoint, is to implement a system or functional area cross training and assignment to promote the migration from "stovepipe" to partnership and promote education within staff and command structures. Using the Army example, a public affairs officer cross-trained and assigned in information operations or vice versa would enable the collaborative partnerships necessary.

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